

“I was Sick and ye Visited Me.”

The Sermon

PREACHED IN

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH,

ON

SUNDAY, AUGUST 2ND, 1874,

ON BEHALF OF

THE DEVONSHIRE HOSPITAL AND BUXTON BATH
CHARITY,

BY THE RIGHT REV. RICHARD,

LORD BISHOP OF CHICHESTER.

*Published at the request of the Chairman of the Board of Trustees
and Committee of Management of the Hospital.)*

BUXTON:

J. C. BATES, “ADVERTISER” OFFICE, HOT BATH COLONNADE,
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—ST. MATTHEW xxvi., 36.

Can it be indeed that they who visit and relieve the sick, are visiting and relieving Christ Himself? Is He so entirely one with all the suffering members of His Body—so bound up with all their afflictions? Can He Who sitteth at the right hand of the Father, far above all human trials and troubles, still so tenderly feel for and with us poor mortals, who are of few days and full of misery?

My Brethren, this is the very truth, for we have it from His Own blessed lips:—“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.”

Thus He provides that all who love His Name, should “love not in word, neither in tongue, but in Deed, and in Truth.” For when we shall stand before His judgment seat where all shall be judged without respect of persons, He, the great Pattern and Author of Love, shall ask us severally: Where are the proofs that ye have loved Me in sincerity? Where are the naked ye have clothed? Where are the hungry ye have fed? Where are the sick that ye have visited? And they only who have loved the brethren for His sake; who have “made to themselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness” shall be acknowledged of Him in that dread day; they and they alone shall enter into the Joy of His Kingdom.

My Brethren : Ever since the Gospel of Christ was preached, and the Church of Christ built upon the foundations of Apostles and Prophets, this Law of Love, this New Commandment has been a living power.

It has ever been felt that if you would render to God true and undefiled service, or, as St. James calls it, true religion, you must visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction. These stand as examples, because they are the most desolate and the most friendless, so that in them as in a sort of figure you learn what is the duty of Christians towards their brethren in affliction. Suppose the Apostle had said : True religion and undefiled is to visit the sick, there would be no difference—no substantial difference. The spirit in either case is one. There is the same necessity : the same call on our sympathy : the same constraining force of Christ's Love towards ourselves.

So it was left to Christian charity to originate Hospitals—for to the heathen Hospitals were unknown—places of refuge and succour, where the sick poor may be taken in and carefully tended, and where they may obtain, without charge, all the medical help which the larger means of the rich enable them to command.

There can be no nobler monuments of real benevolence : none that more tower above the pomps and vanities of the world, and the meanness and selfishness of man's unregenerate nature. But the buildings, ample and magnificent as they often are, would be all in vain unless Christian Physicians, under the constraining power of Christian Love, devoted their skill and their precious time to Patients who can make them no other return than their gratitude and their prayers. Let this be said to the honour of that most useful and enlightened profession, that there

have ever been good Physicians ready to wait on the poorest with as much zeal and as much diligence as if they were able to recompense both. In many a Hospital, whether in town or country, in the least as in the greatest, there are abundant proofs of this true charity. They are conspicuous in this very place; and it is only right and just that we, who do so little in comparison, should thankfully acknowledge the Physician's faithful and disinterested service.

My brethren; a necessity lies on all of us—according to our ability—the Love of Christ constraining us all. But we, the ministers of Christ, ought especially to rejoice in the opportunity of bringing His words before you, and showing you a way by which you may not only obey His call, but follow His example. For He had compassion on the bodies of men as on their souls. He healed both by His Almighty power. “Whenever He entered into villages or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought Him that they might touch if it were but the border of His garment, and as many as touched Him were made whole.” “And the multitudes wondered: when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see; and they glorified the God of Israel.”

I would not compare the virtue of the Buxton Waters with these miracles of mercy. But it has pleased God to give these waters a healing power such as no medicine of Man's making may counterfeit—a power so subtle, so inscrutable, that it almost defies the art of the analyst. And hither flock from every quarter the crippled and the sick, as to another Pool of Bethesda, seeking relief from some of the most wearing and obstinate maladies to which our poor frame is subject. Thus, the Hospital of Buxton

stands on different ground from such institutions in general. *They* provide for local wants ; for the wants of some city or county, or well-defined district. But the Hospital of Buxton opens its doors wide to all comers. It makes no distinction. As a matter of fact, (and to such a congregation as is here assembled it is not without interest,) out of 1407 patients admitted in the past year, only 40 came from Buxton or the neighbourhood, while 160 towns or districts supplied the remainder. From the populous manufacturing regions, which surround us here on every side, where, in an ungenial climate, men and women are tied down to constant and often unwholesome work ; from the crowded dwellings of our cities ; from the mine, the workshop, and the loom, the inmates of the Devonshire Hospital are mainly drawn. I know from long experience what the anxiety is among these suffering people to come hither—how earnestly they seek from some richer neighbour the recommendation for admittance ; how they tell of one or the other, sick like themselves, who left behind them their pains and their crutches, and returned with new health and strength. Great cause have we to bless the goodness of the Lord who has brought from the bosom of the earth this salutary and unfailing fountain. Yes, my brethren, many, I trust, have gone back to their homes and their toil, not only with invigorated bodies, but with thankful hearts ; and among these causes of thankfulness is this : that they found in the Hospital such shelter, such care, such comforts, as in their own houses they could never have enjoyed. Indeed, it is far more than a Hospital ; it is at once that, and a Home for Convalescents. Imagine what the inhabitants of some dingy town, dark with smoke, reeking with foul vapours, must feel when he breathes the pure air, gazes on the green

hills and woods, enjoys the unclouded sunshine of this delightful country—

“ This common air, the earth, the skies,
To him is opening paradise.”

And, as the Physicians give their gratuitous aid, so, let it be said to the honour of the Parochial Clergy, that they also are in constant attendance. They try to improve the feelings of thankfulness, and, with God’s grace, so to fix them on the heart that they may not pass away.

My Brethren : There are several reasons why you should give willing and liberal help to this beneficent institution. I have already said, and I now repeat, that it embraces, with impartial charity, all sufferers come whence they may. It is in its object—National. Now, a congregation such as I see before me represents not only every part of England, but almost every shade of English society. And what has brought together this mixed multitude among the hills of Derbyshire ? It is not the “ whole who need the Physician, but they that are sick.” And, because they are sick, because they hope for help which perhaps elsewhere they have sought in vain, they repair to the spring to which nature, or rather the God of Nature, has imparted such singular efficacy. They wait not upon the skill of man, but on the goodness of God. Therefore, if they be rightly and religiously minded, they ask His blessing, because unless He give His blessing, no means of cure can avail. But who are they to whom this blessing shall be granted ? We have the word of promise : “ Blessed be the man that provideth for the sick and needy, the Lord shall deliver him in the time of trouble.” “ The Lord shall preserve him and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the earth. The Lord will strengthen him upon the

bed of languishing.” “Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.”

My Brethren : When you give your alms to this Hospital—and I hope they will be given with a free heart—it will be a comfort to you to reflect : This gift of mine shall enable some poor member of Christ to enjoy the very same benefits that I, by God’s undeserved mercy, have found. I cast it into His treasury nothing doubting. I do not know, or wish to know, how it shall be distributed. I lend to the Lord, and leave its disposal in His all-wise Hands, even as I leave to His Holy will the care of my own health and well-being. Now this is the spirit of Faith and Love. What can I ask better for you and myself that it may live and grow in us all !

But are there any here to whom such thoughts as these have not occurred ? Holy Scripture has a warning for them, which this very week they might have heard. (21 Prov.) “Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but he shall not be heard.” Such a one closes the ears of the Lord—the Lord of Pity—against himself.

But on this I will not dwell. For I hope there are few so steeped in selfishness, so cold, or dead, as not to look with compassion on the sufferings of their destitute neighbours. These sights that meet them here on every side—the lame and crippled dragging their wearied limbs—or with no power to move their stiffened joints—these various forms of affliction must surely speak to every heart. What a tale they tell of wearisome days and sleepless nights ; of pain unspeakable ; of helplessness creeping on year by year ; and sapping the very springs of life !

The heart must be harder than stone which does not feel for such consuming wasting misery as this ! Our Blessed

Lord had compassion on such as these! and He says to all of us: "Go, and do thou likewise!" Most of all he says it to those who have been preserved from any such chastisement, and are in full possession of bodily vigour. Is it not the goodness of God that has shielded you from these maladies that here surround you? In the presence of so many disabled and suffering, learn to be thankful for the large measure of health and strength which, perhaps, for long years the Lord has granted to you. And if you ask what reward can I give unto the Lord for all these benefits that He hath done unto you? Then I answer, Christ is still among you in the persons of His poor afflicted members.

There He is; and there you can reach Him. Can you go yourselves and minister to the wants and the ailments of these your brethren? No; for most of you this is impossible. You have neither the time nor the skill, nor the means, even if you have the will. But this is all the more reason that you should welcome the opportunity which now is offered.

The thoughtful charity of Christian benefactors has founded this noble Hospital. It stands where it ought to stand, and where, I trust, it long may stand, a monument that the lord of this vast domain felt, and acknowledged, that great possessions and exalted rank have their responsibilities as well as their privileges. It is a Palace for the Poor, bequeathed to them by the Owner of many Palaces, and, therefore, it bears his name. And in it may be found whatever can tend to the cure or the comfort of its inmates. If you doubt? Go, yourselves and see! Go, and judge; go, and hear what these inmates can tell you. Hear their words of gratitude—alike to God and man. It is a visit well worth making. But if you cannot do this

—then believe, for you may safely believe, the authentic report of the hospital, and its yearly work, which lies before all of you. I will not fatigue you with details—always wearisome, and fitter for the eye than the ear; but still, in such matters, facts are what we all want, for they are among the most precious arguments. In 1859, the Devonshire Hospital was opened. During the fifteen years of its existence, 18,400 patients have been admitted, and of these 15,800 have been beneficially treated. This is sufficient to show how great the need of such a Hospital was; and how signally the work of it has been blessed. I doubt whether any similar institution could show an equal proportion of success. But I must remind you that it is success obtained at great and increasing cost. By the improved and cheapened means of communication, by the railways, which cover our country as with a network, patients who in other days must have worn out their lives without hope, are now brought to Buxton in comparative ease and safety. Cases far more severe than the Hospital used to treat, are now frequent; and the treatment of each of such cases involves an expense commensurate with their severity. This is the medical testimony—not to be disputed—and, moreover, the annual subscription, which enables each subscriber to send a patient, is so far from satisfying the expense of his maintenance in the Hospital for the appointed time, that it falls short almost by one half. I express no opinion as to the prudence of such an arrangement; but at least there can be no question as to its liberality. And the large deficiency thus arising has to be made up, and hitherto has been made up, by such contributions as you, my brethren, are invited to make.

This is a plain and a true statement; and it needs neither explanation nor enforcement. Certainly it needs

neither for you, my Brethren, who are met together on the Lord's Day, in the Lord's Own House, to serve and worship God, and Jesus Christ Whom He hath sent. You are the Body of Christ, and His members in particular. You cannot be ignorant that if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it: so close and so tender are the bonds of that charity which binds us one to another in Christ the Head of all. Think upon Him who went about doing good, and gave us all an example that we should follow His steps! Think of the exceeding love wherewith He hath loved us; and, for His Sake, love and succour the needy and the afflicted. Let this mind, which was in Him the mind of compassion, be in you and abound, not *now* only, but wherever you find want, and pain, and misery. Be forward and glad to give your help. So shall you be His disciples. So shall ye know that ye know Him. So shall ye hear in that dread day from His own Blessed Lips—

“ I WAS SICK AND YE VISITED ME.”

J. C. BATES, PRINTER, BUXTON.

INCORRECT
PAGINATION
ON FINAL
PAGE